7: Gulick E-5 (1952) 1955 ME1 Lebanon ME1

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOR

RITES OF PASSAGE

BIRTHDAYS AND BAPTISM

IN the traditional culture of the Middle East (urban, village, or nomad), the status of midwife is a very important one. Midwives are invariably local women past menopause, and men are rigidly excluded from the house while the birth is taking place (cf. Granqvist, 1947, pp. 56–60).

Only one villager was born during the period of study, and the event took place in Beirut (the family is in the Summer Resident category) some time before the writer learned of it. The majority of Munṣif's housewives of childbearing age live in the city most of the year, and for the most part they clearly prefer the services of physicians and hospitals in important medical matters.

Once born, the modern village infant, judging from the very few cases observed, spends his time in a crib and is not swaddled restrictively. After the first few weeks, he may be fed from a modern nursing bottle. Factory-made toys are not very common in Lebanon, but small cars and trucks and at least one tricycle were observed in the village.

Birthday anniversaries are celebrated in a few families. There is a cake with candles, and the whole affair is new, probably inspired by experiences in American boarding schools.

Baptism is performed anywhere from forty days to about two years after the birth of the child. It appeared that the mode tended toward the latter age. The ritual is accompanied by at least a family party, but in some cases, according to one informant, the baptismal party may approach a wedding party in size.

ENGAGEMENT AND MARRIAGE

Engagement. Engagement (*khuṭbi*) is a more or less formal status. Quite often the couple simply declare themselves engaged, with the tacit approval of the priest. If both parties are members of the village, the priest's only official concern is that they are more distantly related than first cousin. If they are first cousins, it is his duty to inform them that he will be unable to marry them. In any case, the couple may or may not come to the priest for his blessing. Wedding rings (plain gold bands) are worn by both parties on the right hand to signify engagement. At the marriage ceremony, they are transferred to the left. Engaged couples may see each other alone at any time, and no questions are asked. Young